

Updates for Universal Design in the Tub/Shower

Planning & Design

Posted: July 2nd, 2009 11:51 AM GMT-05:00



The Lifestyle Shower Systems from Delta Faucet Co. incorporates elements of Universal Design, including generous size, flush threshold, built-in storage and optional seating, all in an appealing design.

It will not come as news to you that we have design issues and opportunities relating to the age boom and the tub or shower. As bath designers, we are certainly aware of the safety concerns in this space, where we not only approach, but also sit and stand or enter and exit the fixture, sometimes from wet/slippery surfaces.

Knowing that the bath product industry is aware of these and other challenges in the bath space, I headed to the Kitchen/Bath Industry Show to check out what might be new. For this column, we'll focus on what I found relating to design for safe maneuvering in the bathing area.

Did I mention that regardless of need or concern, few of us or our clients are willing to compromise aesthetics for even the best solution? My finds at K/BIS had to meet this dual criteria – be both attractive and have improved access.

The Challenge

At opposite extremes of the aging process, challenges in areas such as stamina, balance and dexterity increase our need for support to move around the space and to operate in/at the fixtures. This is especially challenging in the tub/shower area, where we add the risk of wet surfaces.

As we advance in age, changes in vision, agility and mobility add to the difficulties we face in maneuvering in these areas. We also insist that our bathrooms be beautiful and luxurious, and we expect this to occur within our budget, whatever that might be. To stay within budget, not only the products and design, but also the installation must be straightforward and reliable, particularly if it's non-traditional. These are the main criteria product manufacturers are facing – access, beauty, ease of installation and affordability.

Responsive Products

Let's look at some of the products at K/BIS that met this criteria. For some time, there have been a few good sources for grab bars that blend with the design of a space. This year, support systems or grab bars that do the job and do not look the part are blossoming. More major manufacturers have incorporated grab bars into their lines, so that the bars coordinate with the other accessories.

Healthcraft Products, known for bath safety products that have tended more to a medical model, introduced

the Invisia collection, which includes decorative supports that are integrated into accessories. This integration of the support with other aspects of a fitting or fixture is a great stride forward and, in the shower, options for hand-held sprays and support bar combinations are growing in number and sophistication.

The number of tubs with doors has increased, as have the design approaches for these products. For many, the opportunity to sit to exit/enter the tub is critical, and tub decks have grown in size, perhaps for the appearance, but also answering this need. Kohler has introduced an elegant accessory for its Parity tub that looks and functions as a tub shelf for that book or glass of wine, but also functions as a transfer surface.

Creating a flush entry to the shower is beneficial not only for those who roll into the shower, but also for the rest of us who may be less than attentive to the raised threshold or who may prefer not to raise our feet off the floor as we maneuver.

In the past, creating a flush threshold, particularly if a trough style drain was included, has involved design of custom parts and pieces, and tremendous willingness on the part of the contractor. While there have been commercial-looking trough-style drains, there is now a residential product that looks good and is reasonably easy to install – the Quick Drain.

In terms of meeting all of the criteria, Delta Faucet Co. had a private showing of its new Lifestyle Shower Systems, and these systems seem to have accomplished it all. I had a chance to “kick the tires,” and the shower that caught my eye was generous in size, at 63"x39", and of an upgraded quality. It had clean lines, with built-in storage, and optional fold-up seating and support integrated into the design. It had a flush threshold, trough-style drain and an option for frameless glass French doors, with a generous door swing.

It was available in a version that could be broken down for remodeling situations, and it had a central drain location and a locking system for installation that made it easy, reliable and flexible. While the new line has a number of offerings, this one appealed to me for its size and its ability to be accessorized for the luxury shower.

The number of new tub/shower products targeting the aging-in-place market was great, and these are simply a few of my favorites. If I missed some that you have found, please write in and we'll build on the list. The good news is that manufacturers are awakening to the demand for universal bath design, and thanks to them, we have more options and opportunities. This doesn't mean we have reached the finish line, so I hope this just whets the appetite of designers of both the space and the products to continue in this direction.

Printable version may be for personal use only. Content may not be duplicated, re-used or otherwise replicated without expressed, written consent from [KitchenBathDesign.com](http://www.kitchenbathdesign.com) and/or the original author/source.

Visit [KitchenBathDesign.com](http://www.kitchenbathdesign.com) daily for the latest industry news, commentary, features and more.